

Superstitions!

Alan Tebbit, BEM "Tebzy".

A welcome return from sick leave of a well-known former Chelmsford busman.

When Peter Offord went out on the 11.05 service 32A from Chelmsford to Ongar, we knew that he was asking for trouble. It was Friday 13th, he was on duty OMO 13, and he had been allocated Bristol MW5G saloon 1313 (208 MHK). If you were at all superstitious, then the odds were stacked against him. All went well until he turned into Duke Street. A very kind lady in a Humber car had let him out, and he flashed his headlights in response. One of the problems with those early MWs was that the light panel was mounted horizontally on the dash, and to access it, you had to put your hand through the steering wheel. As he let the lock off, the spokes jammed his hand, or his hand jammed the spokes. Either way, the bus continued on full lock, until it stopped with its front wheel against the kerb, and its offside corner against the bus station wall. No damage there, but he had hit the back of the Humber. Peter argued that if the stupid woman had pulled away when the road was clear, she wouldn't have been hit. (First rule of bus driving: always shift the blame).

So why were we superstitious of dual purpose MW5G 1408 (1256 EV)? Well, it was a question of arithmetic. $1+4+0+8$ equals 13. There was nothing wrong with the bus, it was lovely to drive, but it always seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, nothing ever serious, but annoying. I had three run-ins with it myself. I was driving along Chelmsford High Street one morning. The beginning of the street was four lanes wide, two each way, but it narrowed to just over sixteen feet wide at its junction with New London Road. As I neared the junction, one of our deckers came out, and slightly crossed the centre of the road. We missed each other, but I came close to the pavement, narrow at this point. My nearside indicator, about shoulder height, hit the arm of an off-duty policeman. Luckily, he had on a thick coat and long-sleeved pullover, so wasn't hurt, but a bit miffed. On another occasion I was coming back from Romford with 1408, it was dark and snowing. Just before climbing Three Mile Hill at Widford, a giant tree fell across the road. I stopped safely, just in time, but the road was blocked. Fortunately, the ground was quite frozen, so I drove across the grass, and carried on.

The only time that I had to sign my record card over 1408, was when I came in to finish my shift one evening and was in a hurry to go out on a date. I pulled up in the queue for the fuel pump, behind one of the Duple bodied RE coaches. The MW had never been designed for one-man operation, so there was no room to store a Setright box in the cab. Retrieving my box from the saloon luggage rack, I felt the bus lurch, and heard something go bump. The front of unlucky 1408 was embedded in the rear of the coach. The solidly built ECW bodied was unscathed, but the flimsy Duple locker door was not going to be operational for a day or two, and an alternative coach would be heading for Scotland the next day! I signed my bus off as defective. By pushing down on the brake pedal, and hauling on the ratchet handbrake, I showed the duty fitter that I could achieve 11 notches on the handbrake. Anything above 5 was a defect, so obviously the handbrake had not held, causing the bus to roll forward, and partially exonerating me (see rule 1 above). Some years later I was attending the retirement party for one of our long service employees. Always a time for reminiscences, he suddenly said to me, "Do you remember the time that I failed to put that coach in gear, and it rolled back into your bus?" Another example of Rule 1.

By this time several drivers were reluctant to use 1408, so it became a popular dock replacement, going out to various depots. At one time she was on loan to Bishops Stortford and was involved in one of the most horrendous incidents that I can recall. She was being driven by a lovely man, Fred (I never knew his surname). Always jolly, his cap at a jaunty angle, a very good and experienced driver. In a very narrow street, he met a car transporter. They were slowly negotiating each other, when tragedy struck. Neither vehicle was damaged, but Fred received injuries, too graphic to describe here, and died instantly. Naturally the Stortford drivers wanted 1408 replaced immediately, they could not bring themselves to drive it. A substitute was sent out, and 1408 returned home. But we wouldn't drive it either, we had had enough, and she was parked in the naughty corner. After a period of stalemate, one evening, a Basildon driver turned up with their 1418 (804 WVV), an almost identical dp, and took 1408 away. I don't know if BN drivers were ever aware why the change had been made, but we were pleased to see the back of the jinxed bus.

As the years passed, the Bristol MWs went to pastures new, and the 14xx numbers appeared on a new breed of bus, the Leyland Lynx. Chelmsford were due to receive quite a few of them, and it was soon speculated whether anyone at head office remembered the 1408 saga, or even cared. Obviously not, as F408 LTW, aka 1408 was among our allocation, and it turned out to be the worst of the bunch. There were rumblings of discontent in the canteen.

Then, of course, it happened. Frank Passfield had it for a run to Ongar. Between High Ongar and Four Wantz, the route turned off of the A414, to serve the Old Chelmsford Road. Frank waited patiently for a gap in the oncoming traffic, and a small gaggle of cars pulled up behind him. When he got the chance to turn, a young motorcyclist was overtaking the held-up vehicles, ploughed into the side of the bus, and was fatally injured.

Unlucky 13 ($1+4+0+8$) had struck again!

EBN674p4

Duck, or Grouse! Alan Tebbit BEM.

A posting recently on a Facebook site showed an Eastern National Bristol VR no. 3111, in National Holidays' overall advert livery, emerging from the railway over-arch in Duke Street, Chelmsford. The post prompted many comments about how close the bus had come to colliding with the stonework. I have driven under there on thousands of occasions, and must admit to showing some contempt for the dangers of it.

We Chelmsford based drivers knew exactly the line that we could take, the central seam of the tarmac surface kept in line with the steering column, would ensure safe passage. At the northern (bus station) end, it was essential to follow this simple rule, but from the middle of the

arch, it was possible to head towards the kerb, and when exiting the arch, the rear nearside wheel could brush the kerb, without the roof brushing the stonework. I must admit to flattening the roof vents on VR 3002 on the day after the road had been resurfaced. I recall one day, when I was conducting on a Bristol K, with driver Owen Elliot. We were heading for the bus station, when we encountered driver Roy Livermore, our first Caribbean driver heading the other way. I can still see his gleaming smile as we passed safely, actually under the arch, accompanied by a sharp intake of breath from the upper deck passengers.

Chelmsford drivers were made aware of two unwritten rules regarding the arch. One was that buses approaching from the north would give way to those coming the other way. This was not a safety concern, more one of courtesy. The crew heading into the station could be at the finish of their duty, or hoping for a quick cuppa, and it would be unfair to delay them. The second rule was that no bus should turn right towards the arch, even on "dead" journeys, but instead operate via the forecourt, and gain Duke Street from Fairfield Road, giving it a straight run at the bridge, and a clear view of buses, or other high vehicles approaching from the other side. This rule was relaxed when the revamped bus station was opened in 1974, with most services departing from the bays inside the depot. That right turn was the cause of a few accidents in the ensuing years.

When I was still young enough to be at primary school, I remember my dad, a driver at CF depot, coming home to relate a sad tale. A driver from a company down south, possibly Thames Valley, Hants & Dorset, or Wilts & Dorset, had collected a brand new highbridge Bristol K or KSW from Eastern Coach Works. Arriving at Chelmsford about lunchtime, he decided to sample the busmen's canteen. The easiest way would be to follow a local bus labelled up Chelmsford. All went well until the ENOC lowbridge decker dived through the arch. The new bus didn't make it, and severely damaged its' roof. It returned to Lowestoft once it had been made safe.

I was only four years old when Hicks Brothers of Braintree were brought under BTC control, and started to use Eastern Nationals' station, so I never saw them turning in to Park Road, to serve their own station. I have great admiration for those Hicks' drivers who made the tight turn, between the arch, and the Railway Tavern. The top deck must have been right up against the stonework of the arch, to get enough of a swing. On leaving, the same situation occurred, with the rear nearside close to the arch, and the front offside dome at least twenty feet out towards the underside of the arch. For new drivers it must have been nerve racking. Luckily, the maximum dimensions at that time were 27 feet long, by 7 feet 6 inches wide.

I have already told in my piece about my time as vehicle output, of the Southend driver who hit the arch with an ex-Alexander VR, and how I travelled with him to Southend, to retrieve the spare bus that I had loaned him. In my time at CF the arch was also struck by a VR driven by my pal, Dave Hensman, again by not lining up on turning right under the bridge. My favourite though was driver, later inspector, Ian Gray. Talk about a poor workman blaming his tools. He claimed that he was properly lined up, but his VR was so powerful (?!) that it did a "wheelie", and the front wheels lifted, raising the bus above bridge height. He was lucky not to injure the herd of pigs flying under the arch.

My first encounter with Robin Orbell, when the NBC appointed him as General Manager, was when he bounded into the paying in room at CF. He introduced himself and asked if there were any operational problems at the depot. I told him that the rail bridge was a bit of a pain. He replied with arrogant confidence that he would solve that by going 100% single deck omo. 40 years on, and First are still running 'deckers, but they have been diverted away from the bridge.

A car transporter full of redundant GPO vans became wedged under there one day, which severely disrupted services, and many carnival floats were too high to negotiate it. Once a flat-bed truck, loaded with wooden crates ventured through. The top crates struck the bridge, ropes snapped, and the crates tumbled. They contained chickens on their way to slaughter. Most were recaptured, but I knew of one that found sanctuary in a hen house in our back garden. Then there was the day that my wife picked me up from work in our Mini 1000. I drove off along Duke Street, keeping that seam in line with the steering column, and wondering why a pantechicon was bearing down on me, with flashing headlights. Whoops!

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Alan Tebbitt, BEM on Mill Beach services

The Chelmsford to Mill Beach service (48) was started in National Omnibus and Transport days, and continued until the 31st of August 1960. My 1951 timetable shows 4 journeys a day on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday during July and August only, the first leaving Chelmsford at 10.30 am, the last returning from the beach at 9.15 pm. The return fare was 2 shillings (10p). Before supermarkets had 2-4 hour opening, Wednesdays were early closing days, so clearly a popular destination for shop assistants.

Continental holidays were on the up by the time that I actually travelled on the service, in its' final month. By this time, it was down to 2 journeys only on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the school summer holidays. That was on a Bristol SC4LK, probably 436 or 9, (606/9 JPU), the regular OMO saloons allocated to CF depot driver, Alf Attwood, and I were the only people on the bus between Hatfield Peverel and Mill Beach, in both directions. Mill Beach was also served by services 64/5 from Maldon, later 94/5 in the 1952 renumbering. These were taken over from Quest on 1 January 1935 and relinquished to Osbornes on 22 January 1965.

When I was in Eastern Nationals' head office in 1965, I came across a lot of correspondence between the company, and the owners of the Mill Beach hotel, who were claiming compensation for damage to their car park, citing the buses as the main culprits. Presumably Osbornes were also asked to cough up. I believe that this was part of the reason, along with lack of patronage, that ENOC withdrew from the area. The Mill Beach caravan site was popular with people from the East End of London.

I recall one bank holiday Monday in 1967, when I was late spare conductor at CF. We were sent to Maldon with a Bristol LD5G, to work a 31 duplicate back home. There didn't seem to be many potential passengers, but the Regulator, Long Tom, said to wait until Osbornes brought the hobbledehoys up from Mill Beach. Shortly after a well loaded RT pulled up, and we were deluged with passengers. On arrival at Chelmsford, Inspector Sonny Calver, directed us to stand 1, and announced "all Romford, Ilford, Stratford and Bow passengers remain on this bus", and off we went with a full bus, most of them from Mill Beach.

Mill Green was also served from NOTC days by service 10B, later 30B, on Fridays and Saturdays only, 2 journeys in the morning on market day, and afternoons on Saturday.

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1610 - a fast bus, Alan Tebbitt

I was reminded of my old pal Lloyd Allen, with one of my all-time favourite REs, dual purpose 1610. Lloyd was such a charismatic man, with that typical Caribbean laid back attitude to life. I never saw him without that broad grin, and nothing ever phased him, truly a sad loss. As for 1610, I have lost count of the Saturdays that I spent racing up to Hemsby (Gt. Yarmouth) on the old X2 (later 082) on the back road via Bury. St. Edmunds. What a flying machine; on the return journey we would dup an Eastern Counties car. On one occasion the ECOC driver gave up trying to keep up with me, and, during our break at BSE, demanded to know "what the **** was under there?". It was popular on the 2300hrs service 152 to Stock. This ran as far as required, then returned "dead". Usually it only ran as far as Galleywood "Eagle", but one night I had a young couple for Stock, most annoying! As the few remaining passengers alighted at the Eagle, I noticed that they were trying to become intimate on the back seat, with the removal of certain garments. I roared off at full power, negotiating the bends at full speed, and inventing a few extra bends where there was no traffic, in order to make their liaison difficult. After a handbrake stop at Stock, the young lady, on alighting, said "Thanks for the ride", in a most aggressive manner. I replied, "I wasn't aware you got one!".

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The Stork challenge by Alan Tebbit

I'm reminded of when BS 2810 and SD 2721 were used in the making of a tv advert for Stork Margarine. Not a very good picture, scanned from the company's staff magazine "Grapevine" of August 1990, shows me about to leave Central Works on a Sunday morning, with 2721, wearing my issue overcoat, that still fits me. Alongside is 2810, which was driven by my old pal, the late George Gittens.

Filming took place in Enfield, Monday to Friday, and for some reason that I never fathomed, we spent Sunday night at Kings Cross, with the buses parked in the company coach station, surely it would have been easier to go direct from Chelmsford on the Monday morning? We stopped at the Kia Ora cafe at North Weald, for a cuppa. The proprietor soon realised that the buses were drawing in custom, people thinking that they might get on tele, so he kept plying us with free tea and cakes, to keep us there. From Monday onwards we were billeted at the Enfield Chase Hotel, paid for by the film company, a very upmarket establishment. George refused to pay 5 shillings (25p) for a pint, so we spent 9/- (45p) on taxis to and from a proper pub. (We could claim expenses for taxis, but not for beer).

The site chosen was a residential street, with a central reservation about 50 feet wide, the buses being drawn up on a temporary roadway, paced diagonally across the reservation. One day was allowed for tasting. There was a mixture of salted, or unsalted butter and Stork, spread randomly on 6 salted, or unsalted crackers, almost impossible to tell. Anyone who ticked all 6 boxes received a £5 prize. One of the locals, who lived right where we drove across the kerb to park, was a taxi owner/driver, who vociferously objected to us being there. He was invited to take the challenge, and was the only person to tell the difference (I don't think he actually did, but it was worth a fiver to shut him up). Those who failed the challenge were invited back the next day, and were paid £10 to appear in the advert.

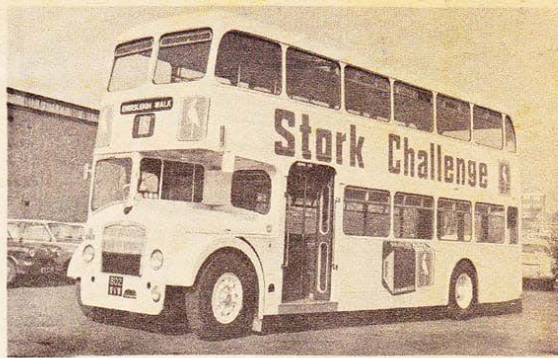
We spent most of the time just sitting around. We had to do a couple of hours filming, showing the buses arriving on site. This involved us driving out of a side turning, me in front, with George close behind. The director assured us that the roads would be closed, so we could drive across the give way lines with no worries. We set off, and just as we neared the junction, my drivers' instincts cut in, and I stopped, praying that George would do the same. Almost immediately a car came from the blind corner to my right, and dodged across the junction, the driver blissfully unaware how close he had come to disaster.




Jubilee

Can you tell the difference? 2721 ready to leave New Writtle Street to star with 2810 in a Stork T.V. advert. Filming lasted for 5 days and the commercial was only shown twice.

Here's the cutting from NBC's house staff magazine "Bus News" from Spring 1972 (courtesy David Edwards).



Can you tell the difference?

OUR VEHICLES are by no means newcomers to television and commercials but the project in which these two vehicles were concerned presented something of a challenge.

There are no prizes for recognising the difference between vehicles 2721 and 2810 and furthermore we do not intend to provoke any discussion on eating habits.

Just in case you have seen one of the regular commercials in which the vehicles appear and thought that they seemed vaguely familiar you now know the reason why.

Very soon after filming, however, they were restored to their normal running livery.

(all above from Facebook group Eastern National Remembered)

And a picture from Richard Delahoy's collection, taken at Central Works on 16th March 1972



Eastern National Fords - further recollections of a former Chelmsford Busman.

Alan Tebbit BEM including additional research by Chris Stewart.

The Eastern National company was never really associated with Ford buses and coaches. There were a few Model Ts taken over in the early National days, but the first purchased new were the 1976 R1014 Duple bodied 43-seat buses, 1000-4, allocated to Stortford depot (BS). Then in the 80s the Transits turned up; how can I bring myself to refer to them as buses? But how many of our readers know that Chelmsford depot operated two Thames Traders in 1969/70? The pair were Duple Yeoman bodied 37-seaters 533/5 CYU. They were owned by Timpsons of Catford, who had just come into the NBC fold. Timpson's was independent until 30 May 1945, when (after the death of Alexander Timpson) control passed to the BET Group (60%) and Tillings (40%). Hence in 1969 it came into the NBC fold.

Timpsons had a contract with the Ford Motor Company, providing transport from their research centre at Dunton, and the Head Office at Warley, to Stansted Airport. This was in connection with charter flights, operated by Gulfair, to Cologne, where Fordworke A.G. had a factory. There was a daily transfer of staff between England and Germany. We also carried internal mail. Naturally, the contract called for Ford vehicles. When Timpsons became part of NBC, the job was transferred to the nearest NBC operator to eliminate dead mileage. The obvious depot was Basildon, but it was experiencing severe staff shortages, so CF took it on. Initially, volunteers were called for, and Cyril Hornett, Les (Dicky) Bird, Derek Clements and myself got the job. We soon reduced the mileage a bit more. Timpsons had operated from Ongar, via North Weald, Old Harlow, the old A11 to Bishops Stortford, the A120 to Takeley, whereas our local knowledge took us via Fyfield, White Roding, through the lanes to Hatfield Broad Oak, joining the A120 at Takeley, Four Ashes. The entrance to the airport was via a country lane, and the terminal consisted of two ex RAF Nissan huts.

Both buses were required on Mondays to Thursdays, the first departure at 0415, the latest returning at midnight. On Fridays only one bus was required, and the spare became the regular performer on a crew operated Friday only operation. This was the 0915 service 50 to Terling returning as a 314 via Little Waltham. The Ford did the 1300 314, and back from Terling as a 50B. Quite a change for crews used to Bristol/ECW products.



Picture Timpsons of Catford, London SE1, 535 CYU, one of six 1961 Ford Thames Trader with Duple 'Yeoman' C41F coachwork, seen at Victoria Coach Station on Saturday 30 July 1966.

Alan Snatt, also thanks to David Lang of website sct61.

Derek and I were young bachelors, whilst the other two drivers were married men, nearing retirement, so when work was found for the Fords at weekends, the young lads found themselves on express work, usually through the single tunnel at Dartford, to Kent and Sussex resorts. The Traders were totally different to anything else at CF, very light to handle, and we soon discovered that they would do over 85mph. I recall breaking down with one, in Kings Road, Brentwood, when the throttle linkage broke. BD depot brought me out an MW coach, and I was delighted to hear a German Ford employee state that it was better than the usual rubbish! The engine was alongside the driver, with the gear-lever coming out from the rear, and bent to come within easy reach. On one occasion a gear lever snapped, and the black hand gang at CF welded a standard FLF gearstick to the stump. To change gear holding the top of the lever meant standing up when it was back, and leaning over the steering wheel when it was forward.

On one occasion I was on the 0415 shift. There was no sign of the coach, and the spare was buried behind several other buses. Output were reluctant to give me an MW dp, as they would be short of buses. Suddenly, we heard a Ford engine, and Derek came racing in. It transpired that he had only one passenger on the late run, a pretty Gulfair hostess. She invited him to her bedsit for "coffee", and by the time he left, the battery was flat. All her neighbours were awoken to help push start the bus.

It was fun while it lasted, but when the loadings dropped off, Ford did it themselves with Transit 12-seaters.



One of the buses Alan was rude about, Eastern National 1000 Ford R1014 Duple MAR 775P seen during 1980 operating service 317 at Bishop Stortford. **Paul Harvey.**

Timpson's by Chris Stewart.

Timpson's traced its origins back to 1896, growing rapidly with the development of both bus and coach operations to a maximum fleet of 250 vehicles in 1931. Sale of Grey Cars (Torquay) to Devon General in 1932 and bus operations in Hastings to East Kent and Maidstone & District in 1934 reduced the fleet but it still comprised 107 vehicles in 1967, mostly AEC Reliances with bodwork by Weymann, Harrington, Plaxton and Duple. The exceptions were 4 Commer TS3/Beadles, 1 Bedford J2SZ10 and 16 Ford Thames 570E/Duple (XLT 521-4, 525-30 BGW and 532-6 CYU). Of these, 535 CYU (one of the pair which feature in Alan's article and were operated by Eastern National) was by chance the subject of Alan Snatt's photograph shown on the previous page.

In 1967 Timpson's had garages in East Ham, Catford, Crayford, Croydon and Ramsgate. Since 1945, following the death of Alexander Timpson during World War II, the company had been owned 60% by the BET Group and 40% by Tillings. Following the acquisition of BET's bus interests by the state, Timpson's became part of the National Bus Company on 1 January 1969 and, with Samuelson's and Tillings, went on to form National Travel (South East) on 1 January 1974.

Other Timpson's photographs, including one or two in colour taken at Wash Lane, (Clacton) are to be found on the ever-expanding www.sct61.org.uk website.

Fordair - Chris Stewart.

Here is the Fordair coach/air timetable for 1998, which was copied down from one held a Ford employee. By then, if memory serves right, operated by Swallow Coaches of Rainham on behalf of Ford; the principal purpose was to enable visits by Essex-based Ford staff to the German plant near Cologne using Ford's own airline facilities on the perimeter of Stansted. Trafford House in Basildon no longer houses Ford and the vast Aveley (Radiator plant) has been demolished, but Dagenham hangs on - a shadow of its former self - and both Dunton and Warley are still important Ford locations. In earlier years a Ford R series coach was sometimes to be seen at Warley, probably operating the service 'in house' during the years that Fords built their own coach chassis - can anyone supply photographs or details?

Fordair	3.8.98 to	23.10.98			
			A		Feeders from Dagenham/Aveley arr. Warley 15.30
Trafford House	05.15	06.15	15.00		
Dunton	05.30	06.30	15.15		
Warley	05.50	06.50	15.35		
Stansted	06.30	07.30	16.15		
<i>Flight departs</i>	07.00	08.15	17.00		
Stansted	07.45	16.30	17.45	19.45	
Warley	08.25	17.10	18.25	20.25	
Dunton	08.45	17.30	18.45	20.45	
Trafford House	09.00	17.45	19.00	21.00	
	B				B – service to Aveley and Dagenham dep Warley 08.30